TECHNICAL NOTES

LAKE STATES FOREST EXPERIMENT STATION
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How Large is the Charcoal Market?

The growing interest in charcoal manufacture in the Lake States Region, as evidenced by the establishment of several new charcoal kilns during the past year, has led the Lake States Forest Experiment Station to begin limited inquiries into the potential market for bagged charcoal for domestic use. First observations were made in the city of Wausau, a town of 30,000 population, in the north central part of Wisconsin. Wausau has a considerable number of local industries; it serves a fairly prosperous surrounding agricultural area; and it services tourists on their way to the lake country farther north. As a charcoal market, it may be considered fairly representative of Wisconsin cities of the 10,000 to 50,000 population range.

A check of the stores of various kinds selling charcoal to the public showed that 37 were handling the product in 1955. These consisted of 16 grocery stores, 10 hardware stores, 4 fuel and lumber dealers, 4 sporting goods establishments, and 3 in a miscellaneous category. The average volume handled per store was less than 1 ton. Practically all of the charcoal offered for sale was in briquette form.

So far as could be ascertained, the charcoal sold in these stores in 1955 was produced entirely outside of the State of Wisconsin.

Six package sizes were generally available. The 10-pound bag appeared to be the most popular, making up probably more than half of the total sales. Second choice was the 20-25 pound bag sizes; a poor third was the 5-pound bag. Larger bags--that is 40 pounds and up--and very small packages, such as the 21-ounce box, were not widely offered and made up a negligible part of the sales volume.

Most of the retail sales of charcoal were made from late May to early September, a period of about 115 days.

In the opinion of informed dealers, sales during 1955 were approximately 85 percent above those of the year earlier. Some of this increase was accounted for by stores handling charcoal for the first time, but most of it was made by those who had sold charcoal in the preceding years. Whether this rate of increase will continue, of course, is not certain. Practically all of the stores experienced some shortage of supplies during the peak of the season, but usually for periods of only two or three days.

Judging from advice received the total sales of domestic charcoal in Wausau in 1954 were about 18 tons or roughly 1.2 pounds per capita. Sales in 1955 increased to about 2.2 pounds per capita. The increased use of 1 pound per capita would be equivalent to approximately 50 cords of wood. This represents about one-half the output of one 4-cord kiln operating 25 weeks a year.

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